

RUTLAND HISTORICAL SOCIETY

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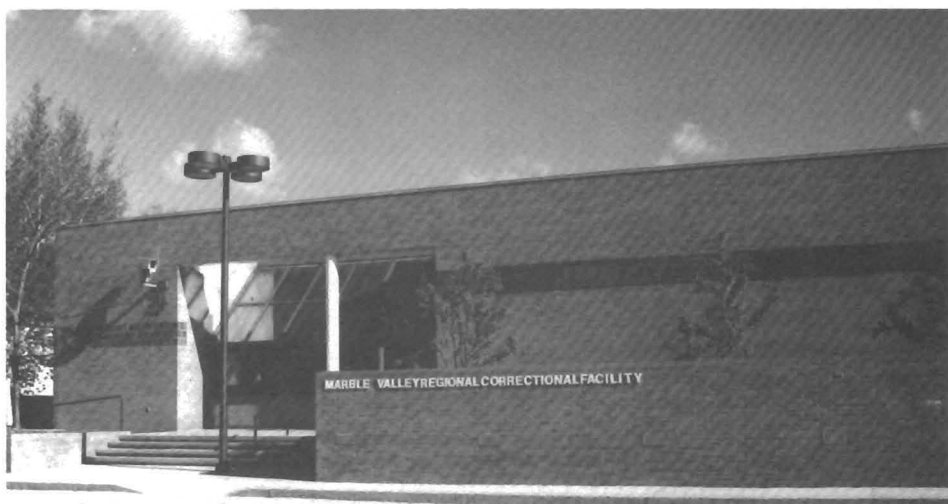
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Rutland Vermont Jails 1784 to 2000



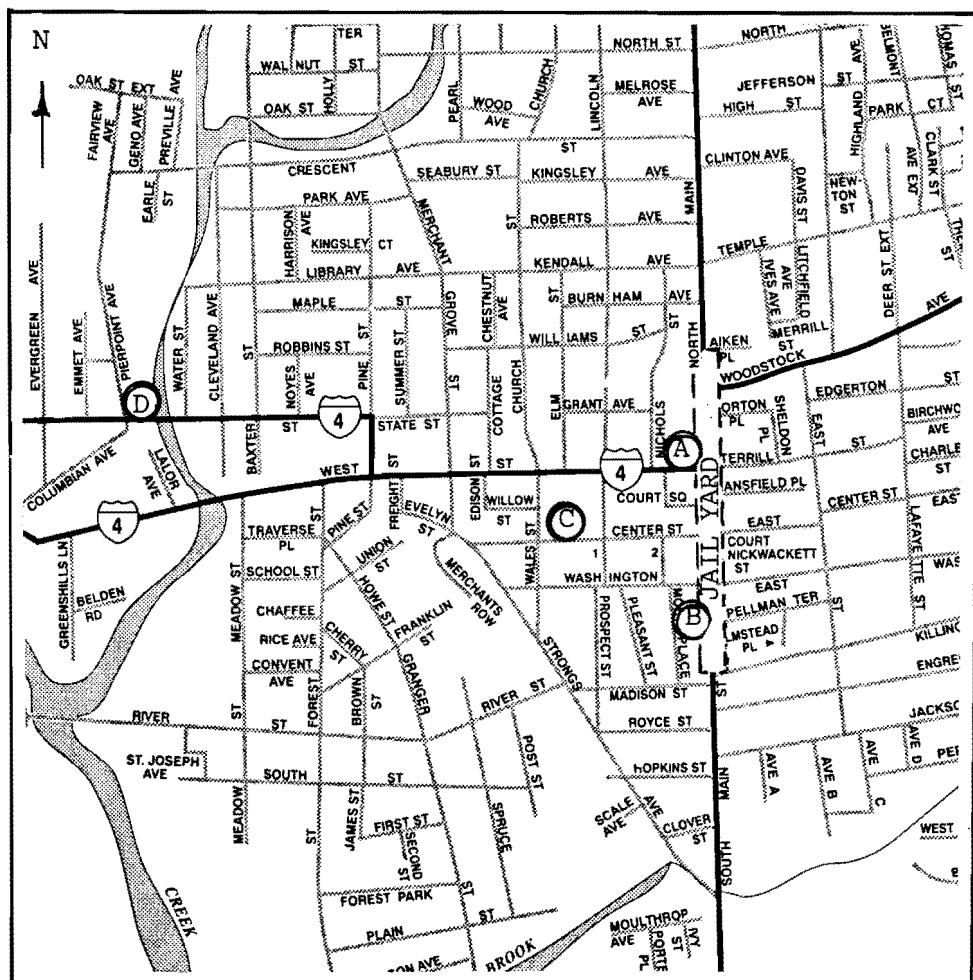
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Vermont House of Corrections (1878-1919)



PAUL J. CROSSMAN, JR.

Marble Valley Regional Correctional Facility built in 1981.



Location of Rutland, Vermont, Jails

(A)	Rutland County Jail	19 West Street	1784-1792
(B)	Rutland County Jail	39 So. Main Street	1792-1812
	Rutland County Jail	43 So. Main Street	1812-1879
(C)	Rutland County Jail	73 Center Street	1919-1981
(D)	House of Correction	167 State Street	1878-1919
	Women's Reformatory	167 State Street	1921-1970
	Marble Valley Regional Correctional Facility	167 State Street	1981-Present

Rutland Vermont Jails

1784 to 2000

by Paul J. Crossman, Jr.

The very first courthouse and jail in Rutland County were located in Tinmouth which at that time was the shire town of Rutland County and home of the most prominent men of the county. The courthouse was the inn of Solomon Bingham. It was built of logs, one story high and about 40 feet long. The family occupied one room and the courts were held in the barroom. The jury retired to the adjoining log barn to deliberate. The jail was located about a mile north of the courthouse.

Rutland County Jail (1784-1792)

In 1784, Rutland was adopted as the county seat. The courts held sessions there from 1784 to 1792 in a gambrel-roofed building having two rooms. The west room was used as a courtroom and the east room for Grand and Petit Juries. The jail was constructed of logs, had two rooms, a door on the east side, and a well nearby. It stood a few yards to the northwest of the courthouse where RE/Max Real Estate is now situated at 19 West Street.

The years following the Revolutionary War (1775-1783) were financially pressing for New Englanders. Many faced imprisonment for failure to meet their creditors' demands or pay their taxes. There was widespread resentment against the courts for sending these debtors to jail. When the County Court convened on 24 November 1786 at the courthouse on West Street it was met by a mob of 600 club-wielding men and boys. The docket was heavy with debtors' cases and the mob's goal was to postpone the session. The militia was called in on the following day. Some 50 prisoners were taken to the jail and forced to stand in the crowded cells.

Rutland County Jail (1792-1812)

In 1792 when the county erected a new courthouse, it also built a new jail on the west side of South Main Street, 165 feet south of the Washington Street intersection on property now located at 39 South Main Street. The land upon which the jail was built was sold by Thomas Hale to Sheriff Jonathan Bell in April 1792. Rutland County residents were taxed 0.5 percent on the list of polls and rateable estate in 1791, and 1.0 percent in 1792 to finish the jail.

In January 1811 Rutland County Grand Jurors made their annual inspection of the jail on South Main Street and found it to be in deplorable condition. In their findings submitted to the Vermont Supreme Court, the Grand Jurors wrote "...It appeared that the principals upon which the jail was constructed were originally defective and the materials of which it was made were totally unfit for any durable purpose. But little regard seems to have been paid to its strength and little to its

convenience. This was the condition when first completed. Since that time its inefficiency has been repeatedly proven by the frequent escapes of those committed within it for the perpetration of any considerable crimes. To repair its original defects as well as those occasioned by almost daily escapes have continually involved the county in heavy expenses without adding to its strength, security or convenience. The jail has now become a mere edifice of shreds and patches from repeated alterations and repairs. The construction and situation of the rooms of confinement are so greatly defective that the all important virtue of cleanliness can never be introduced and a free circulation of wholesome air is prevented by the overwhelming exhalations of the loathsome place. Prisoners, shocking to humanity, resemble the legitimate tenants of the mire, and not the inhabitants of civilized society.... Our jails are erected for imprisonments and not for the barbarous purpose of distress or torture....”

Rutland County Jail (1812-1879)

A new jail was subsequently built circa 1812 on land that Elnathan Darling sold to Rutland County in 1807 for \$400. The land was situated 103.5 feet south and slightly west of the former 1792 jail. Constructed of rough blocks of marble, this new jail consisted of eight rooms, four below and four above. The two front rooms on the lower floor were used for parlors and a hearing room. Two dungeons, one above the other, with marble walls several feet thick and lined with boiler iron were located in the southwest corner. The upper southeast room housed female prisoners. The “Debtor Room” where people were confined for non-payment was in the upper northeast room. The new jail was in use by 1814.

In earlier times it was very common for a person to be sued by a creditor for a very small sum. If the person could not pay what the court decreed he was sent to jail. The practice was finally outlawed in 1839.

In 1857 a 50-foot-long by 30-foot-wide marble extension was added to the west end of the jail. The new section housed two rows of cells to accommodate 30 additional prisoners.

Vermont law provided for the establishment of a jailyard, usually surrounding the business district of the village, where prisoners could obtain employment similar to the work release program presently used by the Vermont Department of Corrections. One such jailyard existed along both sides of Main Street extending from Aiken Place to Killington Avenue. A jailyard marker with the inscription “J. Limit. Extent of jailyard for debtors in 1840...” still stands on the north side of Route 4 east in Rutland Town just east of the Prior Drive intersection.

Five murder trials were held in the second courthouse on South Main Street. The most celebrated of these trials was that of James Anthony who was accused of robbing, then killing a young storekeeper Joseph Green with a hatter’s cooling iron. After hearing the evidence against him during a trial held 4 March 1814, the jury returned a guilty verdict against Anthony within a few minutes. Anthony was sentenced to be hanged 10 days later on 14 April 1814. A gallows had been erected on “Gallows Hill” at the northeast corner of Crescent and Church Streets.



Stone jail erected circa 1812.

Thousands of people had assembled to watch the execution. But the hanging never took place because Anthony committed suicide in his jail cell earlier that day.

[There have been 21 executions (three hangings and 18 electrocutions) carried out at the Vermont State Prison in Windsor during the period 20 January 1864 to 8 December 1954. Capital punishment has since been replaced by life imprisonment in Vermont.]

In 1867 the Rutland County Jail caught fire. As prisoners were being evacuated it was noted that O.B. Clark, a celebrated forger and considered to be one of the most dangerous men in the country, was still confined in the upper cell. Clark was saved from certain death due to the heroic rescue efforts of three individuals who crawled upstairs through blinding smoke, unlocked the cell, and released him.

In the spring of 1879 inmates were transferred to the newly-built House of Correction and the old jail was later sold to George E. Lawrence. The addition was removed and the old section was converted into a residence. The building was torn down in 1890 to make way for a newer residence which now exists on the original jail foundation at 43 South Main Street.

House of Correction (1878-1919)

In 1876 the Vermont Legislature passed an act by which commissioners were appointed to locate and build a "Work House", and \$20,000 was appropriated for that purpose. At the same session Rutland County was authorized to raise and contribute \$20,000 more to secure the building of the institution in Rutland for the purposes of a county jail. State and local officials met in Rutland in March 1877 to discuss a location for a "Work House". The building, located just west of the village line on the bank of East Creek, was erected in 1877-1878 at a cost of \$60,000. During its 1878 session the Legislature changed the purpose of the institution from its original intent as a Work House to a House of Correction. Criminal laws were also amended giving the state courts discretion in sentencing prisoners convicted of a punishable offense to either the State Prison at Windsor or the House of Correction at Rutland.

Under the old jail system the male prisoners, young and old, good and bad, were all confined to one room, in complete idleness and engaging in unprofitable and demoralizing conversation and practices. The jails were training schools of vice. This all changed when prisoners entered the House of Correction. Discipline was the order of the day with special care given to cleanliness, clean and wholesome food and moral instruction. The institution was divided into a north and south wing, or extension, with kitchen, guard room and chapel between. There were 75 cells, four of which were lined with boiler iron and solid iron doors for confining dangerous or unmanageable inmates. When a prisoner entered the institution he/she was first obliged to bathe, then dress in clean clothes, and from that time until release, habits of cleanliness and good manners were constantly enforced. Conversation with fellow prisoners was prohibited, and a full day's work was required. One day each week inmates gathered together for religious instruction and advice. Female prisoners were employed in making, mending and washing prison bedding and clothing. Until the summer of 1879 the prisoners were engaged in the work of grading the grounds, building walls and generally improving the premises. Male prisoners were contracted to finish marble at the rate of 25 cents per day from September 1879 to August 1880, and 30 cents per day thereafter.

The establishment of the Vermont House of Correction reduced the expenses of all the jails in the state by \$9,000 for the two year period 1878 to 1880. The institution also proved to be an efficient collector of fines and costs resulting in \$16,000 per year more in receipts than ever before. A 120-foot by 40-foot workshop was completed in October 1879, additional land was purchased, and a wooden stockade was built around the buildings at a cost of \$6,000.

During the period 1878-1900 admissions to the House of Correction, excluding admissions to the Rutland County Jail, were divided into four classes: Tramping 985; Intoxication 1,693; Selling Liquor 941; All other Offenses 2,449 for a total of 6,118 admissions.

Among "All Other Offenses" were selling matches without a stamp, killing cows, cursing or swearing, intent to become a pauper, resorting to games of chance on the Sabbath, riding a bicycle on sidewalks and disfiguring a dwelling.

Seventy-two prisoners were confined at the institution, seven of whom were women. Commitments from Rutland County during the 22-year period 1878-1900 were 1,571 (26 percent of the state total). Of the total commitments 20 percent could not read or write, 5 percent could read but not write, 33 percent were married, 67 percent were single, 91 percent were males, 9 percent were females, 96 percent were white, and 4 percent were Negroes. Fifty-three percent of male prisoners were under the age of 30.

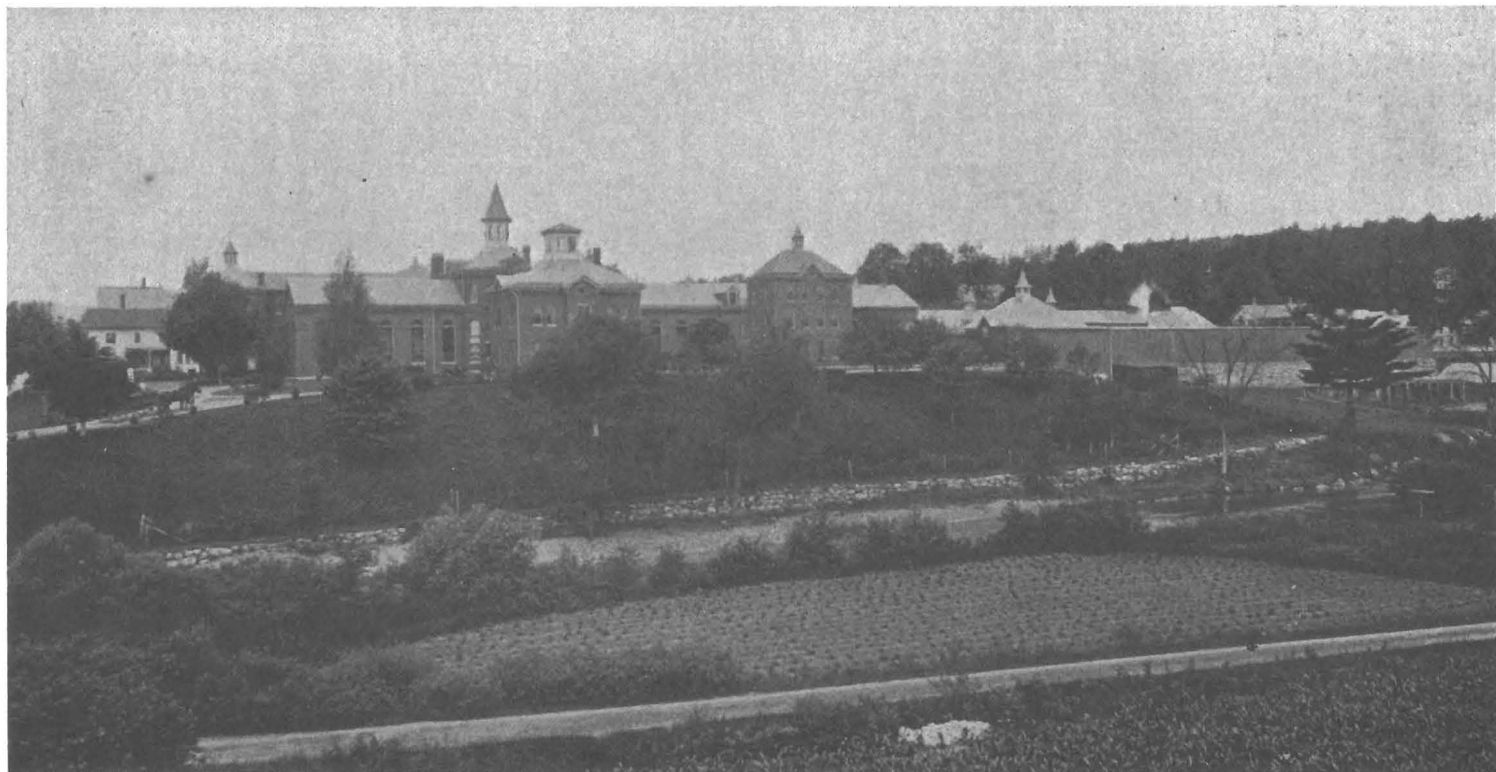
In 1883 those prisoners under the age of 20 were taught common school subjects. Instruction was held five evenings each week. A trade school for young men committed to the House of Correction was also established. For a period of time the Superintendent gave physical exercise and military drill six days each week in the yard. This appeared to be indispensable moral discipline and beneficial to inmates in dealing with the hard problem of monotony.

In 1891 there were 10 to 15 cases of typhoid fever in the institution. This led to improvement of sanitary arrangements and a new hospital building. A physician and chaplain were in full-time attendance.

In 1898 one of the improvements inaugurated was to allow male prisoners to assemble for their meals in a dining room instead of eating in their separate cells. In the same year the Vermont Legislature appropriated \$5,000 for additional land after which 17 acres of the Pierpoint estate to the north were purchased and added to the state's property. This land proved to be productive in terms of gardening and vegetable yield for use by the institution.

The House of Correction was formally closed in 1919, and all the male and female prisoners were then transferred to the State Prison at Windsor.

An old cemetery located behind Northwest Elementary school on Pierpoint Avenue in Rutland has recently been discovered. Within the 39-foot by 77-foot fenced area are 11 grave markers without names or dates but bearing the following inscriptions: R.C.Y., 5741, 6107, 6524, 7115, 7548, 9476, 10310, 10539, —24 [marking incomplete] and one stone without visible marking. It is presumed that prisoners who died while incarcerated at the old House of Correction may be buried here and that the inscriptions may in fact be prisoner numbers although no positive verification to date has been made. The land upon which the cemetery is situated, formerly known as "Riverside Reformatory Meadow", was deeded by the State of Vermont to the City of Rutland on 29 May 1956 for the sum of \$2,000. The City desired this land for an elementary school. The Vermont State Prison Cemetery located in Windsor measures 83 feet by 168 feet and has approximately 35 graves. It has been used since 1880 for indigent inmates who at the time of their death were in custody of the Vermont Department of Corrections and who had no known relatives, friends or community to claim the body.



Vermont House of Correction



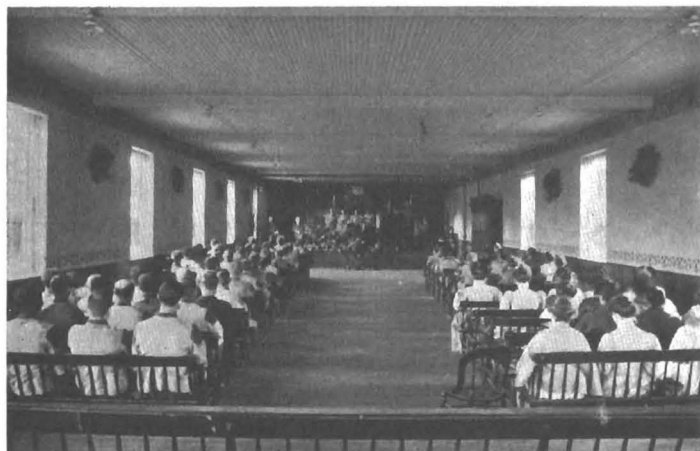
THE VERMONT



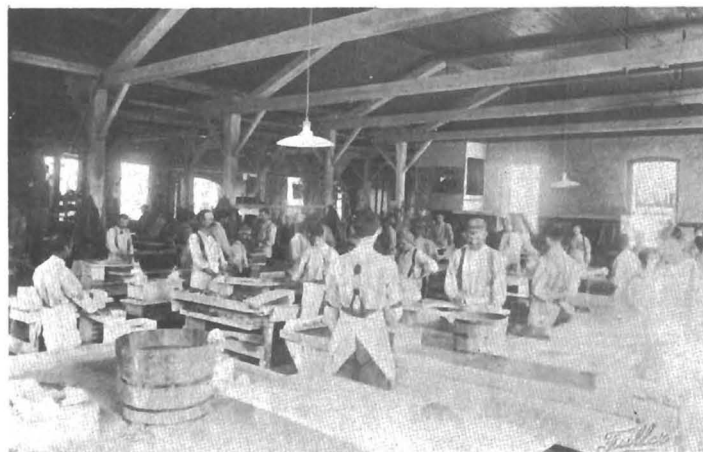
THE VERMONT

(Top) The hospital. (Bottom) The chapel.

(Top) The dining room. (Bottom) The work room.



THE VERMONT



THE VERMONT

Vermont Women's Reformatory (Riverside) (1921-1970)

In 1921, two years after the old House of Correction had closed and all prisoners had been transferred to the State Prison at Windsor, the Vermont Legislature voted to return the women prisoners to the same House of Correction in Rutland. Lena Ross, a first grade teacher of 25 years, was chosen by Judge John E. Weeks of Middlebury, to take charge of the institution. The Vermont Legislature in 1923 appropriated funds to remodel or rebuild the facility. Many changes under the leadership of Miss Ross soon became evident. Gray paint was scraped from the windows allowing the women a view of the mountains. A solid cell block became a dining room. Curtains were hung at the windows. Small tables seating four people each were placed in the dining room. Pictures of oceans and rivers, childhood and motherhood decorated the walls. Another cell block was converted into a chapel with windows that opened to allow fresh air to circulate. Bedrooms were bright and cheerful and arranged to suit the individual's taste lending a homelike environment. The kitchen had one door that opened to the west and led into a courtyard with a lattice fence. The kitchen was also used to host birthday parties, a wedding breakfast, and banquets for the Rutland Women's Club and Rutland Rotary Club. There was a large recreation room where the women could gather to sew, read, listen to the radio, dance, and play games. A piano and several books were donated by the community. Soon a laundry was opened and laundry was being taken in from Rutland people. The laundry room eventually became two rooms...the wash room and ironing room with several windows along the side. The income from the laundry room grew substantially and nearly paid all expenses for operating the facility. The women were paid a monthly bonus and encouraged to set aside one dollar per month for use after discharge. Clothes were delivered to and picked up at Riverside by the families and state facilities, such as Castleton Normal School and the Pittsford Sanitorium, which utilized this service.

Many of the women were serving federal sentences. A work release program was later instituted allowing prisoners to work in Rutland during the day and return to their cells at night. Prisoners were taken in groups to the movies in Rutland or to picnics at nearby lakes. Many of the prisoners were housed at the reformatory because of narcotics violations, murder, prostitution, and burglary. Prior to World War II there were 50 female prisoners at the reformatory. The population dropped to only 16 in 1963 and, at the time of closing in 1967, just three prisoners remained.

An atmosphere of pride, responsibility, and solidarity among the women developed from their interaction with the outside community. Riverside became a model facility for women prisoners. Miss Ross felt that the women should be treated like everyone else and with human dignity...a clean body, warm bed at night, nourishing food and good recreation. The aim of Riverside was to create a constructive rehabilitative program. A healthy body, the importance of human relationships, and an opportunity to gain knowledge, experience and ideals were some of the goals for which Miss Ross strove. Preparation for acceptance into

society following the prisoner's release by creating humanizing conditions that encouraged human ideals was also part of Miss Ross' philosophy. Records indicate that less than 6 percent of the women were repeat offenders.

Lena Ross died in 1936 leaving behind a legacy of love for human dignity. Miss Ross' assistant, Helen Koltonski, was then appointed and warmly received as the new Superintendent and operated the facility until she retired in 1962 at age 70. A *Rutland Herald* news article stated "Miss Koltonski held firm to the belief that sound judgement, common sense and understanding of the female offenders' problems are more effective tools of rehabilitation than are prison bars, walls, and rigid restrictions."

Life at Riverside continued for five more years during which time there were two more superintendents and many operational changes. The State Buildings Board voted in 1966 to close the reformatory, and in 1967 the Vermont Legislature concurred. The facility closed its doors on 30 June 1967. The building was used as the Rutland County Jail for Women until 1970 at which time demolition of the garage began.

Rutland County Jail (1919-1981)

On 23 December 1863 Melzor Edson deeded the land at 73 Center Street to Susan A. Pierce for \$50. It was during the ownership by Pierce in 1870 that the front section of the Italianate building was constructed. It is in an area designated as the Rutland Courthouse Historic District. Pierce then deeded the property to Abbie A. Crain in 1891 for \$6,600. Abbie was married to Mark R. Crain, MD, who owned the building until his death. The property was sold by the Crain estate to Rutland County 11 July 1919 at which time the cell block was constructed. A three-foot wall separated the cell block building from the house section. The cell block was used to house prisoners until January 1981. Each cell contained metal

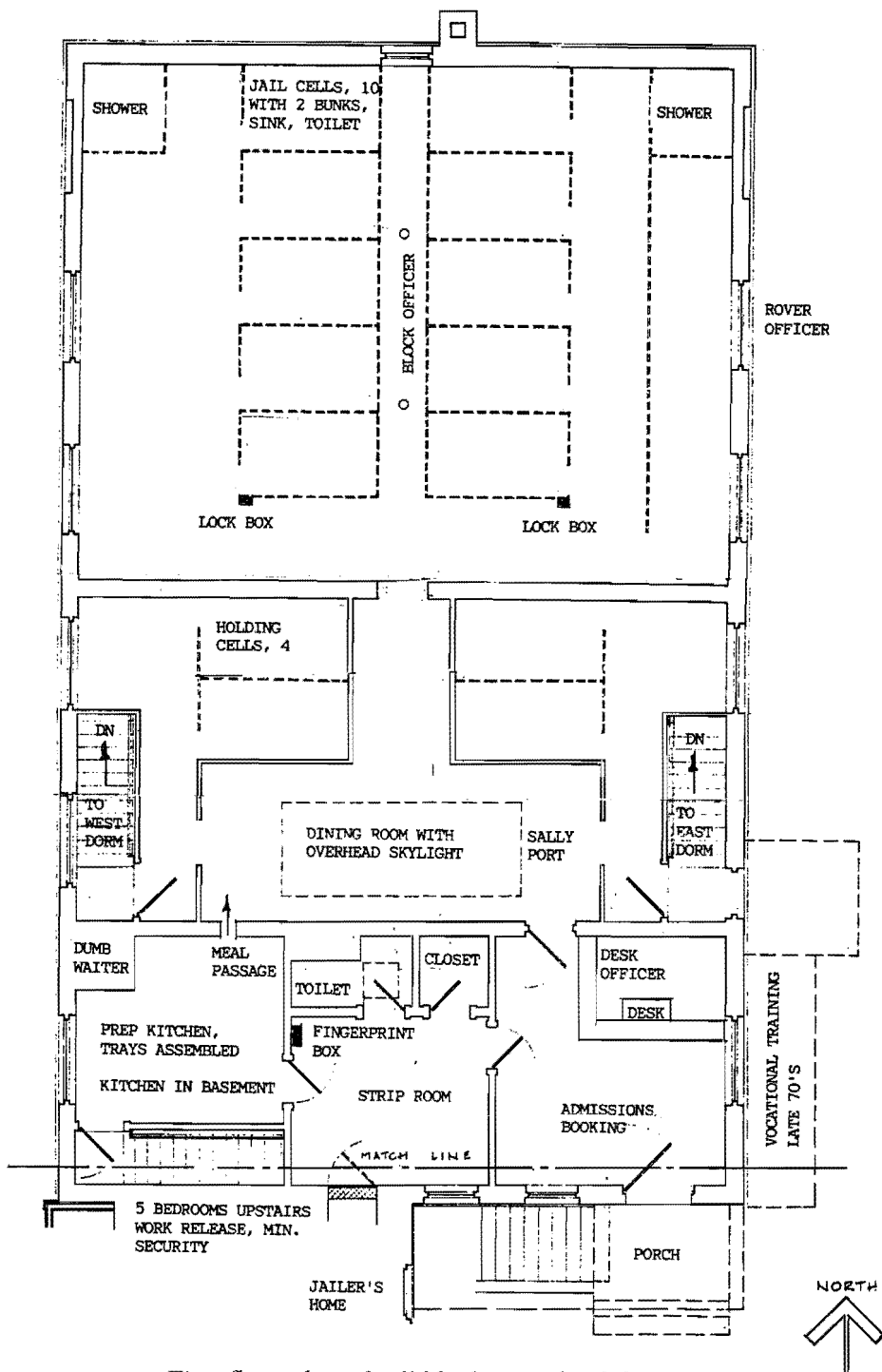


SCOTT BAKER



SCOTT BAKER

(Left) This house and property at 73 Center Street were purchased for the Rutland County Jail in 1919. Later that year a brick cell block building was added to the rear of the house. (Right) A view of the interior cells.



First floor plan of cell block at Rutland County Jail.

wall-hung bunks, a sink and a toilet. The cells were five feet wide by eight feet long. In 1977 the Rutland County Assistant Judges sued to evict the state from the building calling it “unsafe for human occupancy”. In the late 1970’s the jail was plagued by escapes.

The old jail had served as a county lockup for 62 years and became the Community Correctional Center in 1968. Within two weeks after closing, the brick building was occupied by the Rutland County Battered Women’s Network and used temporarily as a safe house for battered women.

Marble Valley Regional Correctional Facility (MVRCF) (1981-Present)

This facility opened 4 January 1981, on the same site occupied by the old House of Correction (1878-1919) and the Vermont Women’s Reformatory (1921-1970) at 167 State Street just west of East Creek. Fifty inmates were transported from the Rutland County Jail on Center Street to the new “Rutland Community Correctional Center” on a Sunday morning at 4:30 a.m. in sub-zero temperatures.

Construction of the \$3.2 million building was begun in August 1973 with Sabotka-Norflor and subsequently John Russell Corporation as prime contractors. The property has a chain link perimeter fence with razor wire. The original marble wall with brick facing still stands along the west side of the property. The 32,500 square foot brick structure has minimum, medium and high security areas. Minimum security inmates are involved in the work-release program. Medium security is for sentenced, pre-trial, and unsentenced inmates and detainees. High security is reserved for protective custody, punitive segregation and detention. There are also two holding cells used to detain inmates pending arraignment at District Court, or for detoxification (DETOX/INCAP) purposes.

The facility also includes areas of Admission/Discharge, Control Room, Visiting, Administration and Support, Medical, Work Training and Learning, Recreation, Laundry, Food Service and Utilities. Administration, Correctional Officers, Medical and Building Maintenance personnel make up the 50-member staff.

Vermont currently has seven correctional facilities. In order of decreasing size they are St. Albans, Newport, So. Burlington, Rutland, St. Johnsbury, Windsor and Woodstock. New or expanded facilities are planned for Newport, Waterbury and Springfield. MVRCF has permanent bed space for 113 beds. Actual admission has at times peaked to nearly 160 necessitating triple bunking of offenders in a two bunk cell, and use of bunk beds in the gymnasium.

Recent upgrades at MVRCF include installation of a dentist’s office, new cooling system, air quality improvement, permanently anchored outside furniture, new razor wire fencing and a new camera surveillance system; also modernization of two boiler systems, paving of parking lot, installation of sprinkler system in all cells and living units, new fire alarm system, new smoke evaluation system and upgrade to living units in accordance with American Disability Association guidelines.



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Population wise during Fiscal Year 1998, MVRCF had 631 detainees, 518 sentenced (including Federal boarders), 95 sentenced/detained, and 328 incapacitated. Federal law requires youthful offenders that have committed misdemeanors to be held outside the confines of the correctional facility where adults are housed.

Recreational activities at MVRCF include spades and cribbage tournaments, basketball, volleyball, handball/ping-pong tournaments, movies and bingo. Special events include Christmas parties, family days, barbecues, staff-offender basketball games and musical programs.

During 1998, 246 individuals from the community gave 5369 hours of their time in the Volunteer Service Program at MVRCF.

Old Federal Building Holding Cells

From 1858 to 1930 this building, now the Rutland Free Library at 10 Court Street, served as the Post Office and U.S. Courthouse. It is believed that the three dungeon-type cells in the basement served as a way station on the Vermont Underground Railroad, housing escaped slaves overnight or until they could be moved north to Brandon and Ferrisburgh. It is also believed that these cells were used during the Civil War (1861-1865) to incarcerate Union deserters and Confederate spies. During the prohibition era they were used by federal agents to store seized stocks of bootleg liquor. The 7-foot by 10-foot cells with two-foot-thick walls were without heat, light or plumbing. Ceilings were the low, arched, medieval-type, and doors were of heavy iron plate.

Rutland City Police Department Holding Cells

For several years the Rutland City Police Department used holding cells at City Hall to lodge suspects arrested and held pending their arraignment in City Court. Three cells in the basement and three more on the first floor, each measuring five feet by seven feet with a two-foot by six-foot iron door and a single bunk bed, were used for men, while two slightly larger cells on the first floor accommodated female prisoners.

Rutland County Courthouse Holding Cell

A room in the basement of the Rutland County Courthouse at 83 Center Street was at one time used as a holding cell for prisoners whose cases were being tried. The room had a hemlock plank floor, a window with iron bars, and single entry through a steel-strapped door. A cement trough in the room was used to dispose of bootleg whiskey during prohibition times. The area is now occupied by the Rutland Family Court.

U.S. District Court Holding Cells

There are holding cells in the U.S. Post Office and Federal Court Building located at 151 West Street used for temporary holding of federal prisoners pending their arraignment, court hearings, or trial.

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About the Author

Paul J. Crossman, Jr., is a Rutland native. He received his education at Rutland High School and the University of Vermont. He retired from the General Electric Company in 1990 after 36 years service as an Electrical Engineer. His duties included field engineering and design and test of complex surface weapons systems for the U.S. Navy. He is a Vermont-licensed Professional Engineer (Electrical). He has been a licensed Private Investigator for seven years. He also volunteers for the Vermont Department of Corrections and the Vermont District Court in Rutland. His interests include the criminal justice system, court watching, historical research, genealogy, computers, photography and traveling. He has written previous articles for the Rutland Historical Society entitled "Pine Hill Stone Crusher and Early Stone Crushing Practices in Vermont (1887-1932)" (Volume 28, Number 2) and "Development of Rocky Pond Recreational Area, Rutland, Vermont 1952-1954" (Volume 29, Number 1).

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